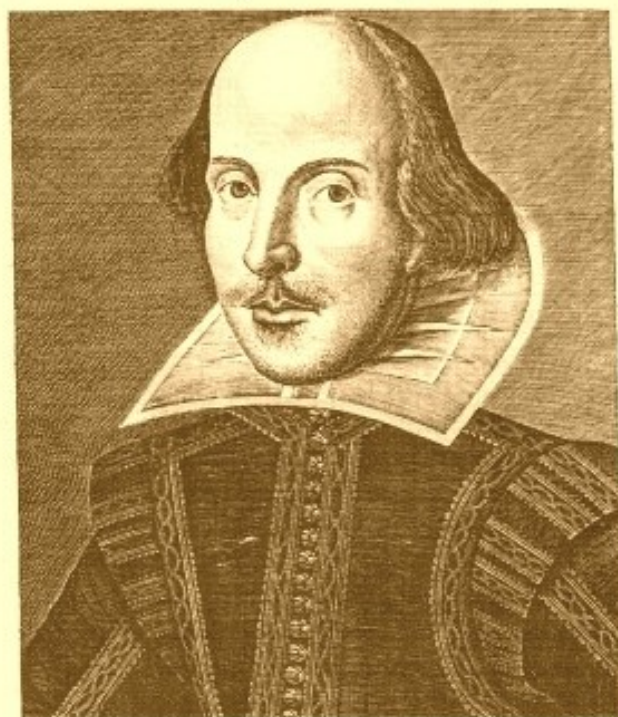


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Mr. CRAD
KILODNEYS
Translations of Wm. Shakespeares
Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies



to Modern English - for contemporary
readers and performers

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Shakespeare For White Trash: The Merry Wives of Windsor

Classic literature translated into Modern English by Crad Kilodney

October 7, 2010 – Author’s Note:

“Shakespeare For White Trash” is a series of condensed rewrites designed to make Shakespeare understandable and enjoyable to those who have little or no knowledge of him. The plots and characters are unchanged, but everything else has been radically restyled. Read my versions and you’ll be a Shakespeare fan forever!

These plays are intended to be performed, as well as read.

Main Characters

Sir John Falstaff

Fenton — a gentleman

Shallow — a country justice

Slender — Shallow’s nephew

Simple — Slender’s servant

Ford

Page

Mistress Ford

Mistress Page

Anne Page — daughter of the Pages

Sir Hugh Evans — a Welsh parson

Doctor Caius — a French doctor

Host of the Garter Inn

Bardolph, Pistol, and Nym — followers of Falstaff

Robin — Falstaff's page

Rugby — servant of Doctor Caius

Mistress Quickly — housekeeper of Doctor Caius

John and Robert — servants of the Fords

Fairies (children disguised)

(William Page is deleted.)

Gist of the story: Sir John Falstaff, an old, disreputable knight, decides to con Mistresses Ford and Page in order to get some of their husbands' money. He pretends to court them. But two of his followers, Pistol and Nym, rat him out to the husbands. Page doesn't take it seriously, but Ford, who is extremely jealous, disguises himself as Master Brook and bribes Falstaff to try to seduce Mistress Ford to test her honesty. Meanwhile, three suitors are competing for the hand of Anne Page — Doctor Caius, Slender, and Fenton. Mistress Quickly pretends to be helping all three of them. The wives pretend to love Falstaff, but their aim is to prank him and humiliate him. The climax comes in Windsor Park at midnight, when Falstaff, disguised as a ghost, goes to meet the wives and is accosted and tormented by a gang of "fairies" led by Anne Page, disguised as the Queen of the Fairies. Amid the commotion, Slender steals in and grabs a fairy he mistakes for Anne, and Doctor Caius also takes the wrong fairy by mistake. Both run off to marry their intended brides, who turn out to be boys. Fenton elopes with the real Anne, who has tricked both her parents and married the suitor she really loves. Falstaff is well and truly humiliated by the wives, who have also proven to their husbands that they are honest. The Pages are reconciled to Anne's marriage with Fenton. The repentant Falstaff is forgiven.

(Audiences loved Sir John Falstaff so much in the two parts of *Henry IV* that Shakespeare reprised him for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. He's a shameless schemer and con artist, and we love seeing him get into hilarious situations. Although Falstaff and his followers are borrowed from *Henry IV*, this play takes place in Shakespeare's own time and is a comic look at middle-class life in an English town. It is one of Shakespeare's most popular comedies.)

Act 1, Scene 1. *Before the house of Master Page in Windsor. Coming in are Justice Shallow, Slender, and Sir Hugh Evans. (Evans speaks with a Welsh accent.)*

Shallow: Sir Hugh, don't try to talk me out of it. I'll take it to the Star Chamber court if I have to.

[Author's note: This Star Chamber was a harsh court created by Edward III and is not to be confused

with the Star Chamber of the Spanish Inquisition.] I'm not letting Sir John Falstaff abuse me like this. I'm a justice of the peace, after all.

Slender: That he is—my uncle, Justice Robert Shallow, Esquire.

Shallow: Indeed—and Keeper of the Rolls.

Slender: Custo-rato-lorum—or rather, custalorum-ruto.—Well, anyway, he keeps the scrolls.

Shallow: Rolls.

Slender: Them, too, yes. And signs his name to every official document so that everyone knows—Esquire costorolum of all Rolls—including affidavits, bills, and all such like.

Shallow: For three hundred years in my family.

Slender: Yes, I'll vouch for that. All his successors before him and all his ancestors after him. And all with the same coat of arms with a dozen white luces.

Evans: That's all right. Louses are friends of man.

Shallow: Luces.—Pikes.—Fish.

Evans: Friends all the same—in salt water or fresh.

Slender: And perhaps someday a quarter of that coat will be mine.

Evans: What good's a quarter of a coat?

Shallow: He means by marrying.

Evans: Marring? You want to take a quarter of the coat and mar it?

Shallow: No, no, Sir Hugh. If he marries, the coat of arms of the bride's family goes into a quarter of our coat of arms.

Evans: You won't cut it into quarters, though.

Shallow: No, no.

Evans: Well, that's a relief.—Now, regarding this unfortunate business with Sir John Falstaff, I, being a parson, should like to facilitate a spiritual atonement—by which I mean a compromise—using benevolence—and Christian charity.

Shallow: I'll drag it to the Privy Council in the Star Chamber, and there'll be a riot when they hear it.

Evans: Oh, we don't want a riot in the Privy Council.

Shallow: If I were a young man, a sword would settle the matter.

Evans: Oh, please, not that. Let your friends be your sword. I'm your friend.

Shallow: I know that.

Evans: And because I'm your friend, I am thinking of something very good for your nephew. Someone very good. You know who I mean. That nice young lady Anne Page, Master Page's daughter.

Slender (Sighing): Ohh—Anne Page. She has nice, brown hair and a nice, sweet voice.

Evans: And more than that. She has an inheritance of seven hundred pounds from her grandfather as soon as she turns seventeen.

Shallow: That much?

Evans: Yes, and that's just for starters. You can be sure her father will leave her a tidy sum also.

Shallow: He's a good man Master Page.—You said Falstaff was in his house at the moment. Is that right?

Evans: Would I lie? I hate a liar as much as I hate someone who doesn't tell the truth. Sir John Falstaff is in there right now. Here, let me knock for you.

(Evans knocks at the door.)

Page (Within): Who's there?

Evans: Parson Evans, and your friend Justice Shallow, and his nephew Master Slender, who I believe has something of importance to talk to you about.

(Page comes to the door.)

Page: Ah! So glad to see you all!—Thank you for the venison, Master Shallow.

Shallow: My pleasure, Master Page—although I fear someone did some mischief to it before I got my hands on it. And how is your wife?

Page: Fine, sir. Thank you for asking.

Shallow: I thank you, sir—always.

Page: And hello, Master Slender.

Slender: I heard your greyhound lost in the dog races.

Page: It was too close to call.

Slender: I understand. You'd rather not say.

Shallow: He doesn't have to say.—Bad luck, Master Page. That's all. He's a good dog.

Page: Aw, he's a mutt.

Shallow: No, no. He's a good dog.—Em, is Sir John Falstaff here—by any chance?

Page: Yes, he's here. And I'm sorry you have a disagreement with him. Perhaps I can help smooth it over.

Evans: Good for you, sir! That's the Christian way.

Shallow: He has wronged me, Master Page. There's no disputing it.

Page: Well, I think he more or less admits it.—Oh, here he is.

(Falstaff appears at the door, along with Pistol, Bardolph, and Nym.)

Falstaff: Master Shallow. I suppose you'll be complaining to the King himself.

Shallow: Listen, you beat my servants, you killed my deer, and you broke into my hunting lodge.

Falstaff: Oh, dear. And did I kiss your gamekeeper's daughter, too?

Shallow: Never mind that. Just give me an answer. Did you or didn't you?

Falstaff: Yes, I did. So what?

Shallow: Well, the Council's going to hear about it.

Falstaff: That should give them a laugh.

Slender: Your men picked my pocket!

Falstaff: Is that so?

Slender: These guys right here—Bardolph, Nym, and Pistol. They took me to the tavern and got me drunk, and then they picked my pocket!

Bardolph: You twerp!

Slender: Don't call me names!

Pistol: He's a lawn ornament.

Slender: You shut up!

Nym: He's one of those gnomes.

Slender: Never mind, you!

Evans: Peace! Peace! This quarrel should be judged by those who are impartial—like myself, Master Page, and the host of the Garter Inn.

Page: Yes, yes. We'll sort it all out politely.

Evans: Exactly. I'll make a note of it and I shall make some discreet enquiries.

Falstaff: Pistol, did you steal Slender's purse?

Slender: He did! And I had two shillings and sixpence in it!

Falstaff: Is that true, Pistol?

Pistol: No, he's lying. It was only two shillings.

Slender: I'm no liar.

Nym: You're a liar and a slanderer.

Slender (Pointing to Bardolph): He's the one who had it.—This red-faced crook. He got me drunk. I can't remember much after that, but I'm no fool.

Falstaff: What do you say to that, Bardolph?

Bardolph: Don't listen to him. He admits he was drunk, so how can he remember anything?

Slender: I'll never be drunk again with the likes of you—only with honest, god-fearing folks from now on.

Evans: There's a good Christian speaking!

Falstaff: The matter is settled. Everything has been denied.

(Anne Page comes out of the house carrying wine, followed by Mistress Ford and Mistress Page.)

Page: That's okay, Anne. We'll drink our wine inside.

(Anne goes back inside.)

Slender (Sighing, aside to the audience): Anne Page!—I wish I had my book of love poems. Then I could think of something to say to her.

Page: Here they are—the loveliest wives in Windsor—my own and Mistress Ford.

Falstaff: She's an angel, Mistress Ford.

(Falstaff gives her a polite kiss.)

Page: Wife, these gentlemen will join us for dinner. *(To the visitors)* We have nice venison and enough wine to make everyone happy and forget any unpleasantness. Come.

(Everyone goes in the house except Shallow, Slender, and Evans, who are interrupted by Simple's arrival.)

Slender: Simple! Where have you been? Have you got the Book of Riddles?

Simple: Book of Riddles? I think you lent it to Alice Shortcake on Halloween.

Slender: Did I? Oh, dear. I was hoping to amuse someone with it.

Shallow: Never mind that. Now pay attention. Sir Hugh here is trying to make an arrangement for you. Do you understand what I mean?

Slender (Puzzled): Well—if it's something reasonable, then I'll be reasonable.

Shallow: No, no, no. You're not following me.

Evans: Your uncle means an arrangement for your marriage.

Slender: Oh.—Marriage.—I see.

Evans: To Anne Page.

Slender: Oh! Anne Page!—Well—whatever is reasonable, I'll do it—if the demands are reasonable.—Whatever my uncle says. After all, he's a justice of the peace.

Evans: Never mind that, lad. The point is, can you love the girl?

Slender: Love her?—Well, of course, in all cases I would try to do the reasonable thing.

Shallow: You can tell he's never had a girlfriend.

Evans: Yes, evidently.—Come, come, now. You must be more definite than that. Consider your desires. She's a pretty girl. Don't you like her?

Shallow: And she comes with a good dowry. It would be a good marriage for you.

Slender: I'll do whatever you say, uncle.

Shallow: I'm not asking you to do whatever I say. I'm asking you if you love the girl—or at least, could you?

Slender: I'll marry her if you want me to. As for love—well—I'm sure that when we become better acquainted with one another, that will happen—more or less as a matter of course. It's like they say. Familiarity breeds contempt—which is fine with me as I should become contempted with her and vice-versa. I'll certainly marry her if you tell me to. Of that I'm totally dissolved.

Evans: He's being discretional, but his dissolve is well-meant.

Shallow: Nephew, I realize you have no experience with girls, but you're in agreement with us, right?

Slender: I always agree with you, uncle.

Shallow (To Evans): I think that's the best we can do.—Ah, here comes the young lady herself.

(Anne Page returns.)

Shallow: Ah, if I were a young man again, Mistress Anne—ha, ha!

Anne: The food is on the table. Father is waiting for all of you.

Shallow: Say no more.—Come, Sir Hugh.

(Shallow and Evans go in the house.)

Anne: Aren't you coming, Master Slender?

Slender: Oh—no, that's all right. I'll just stay here.

Anne: But we've a fine dinner.

Slender: That's all right, I'm not hungry. But my man Simple will eat.

Simple: Thank you, sir!

(Simple goes inside.)

Anne: I can't go in without you, sir. They'll be waiting for you.

Slender: Oh, just tell them to eat without me. I'll just stay here.

Anne: Is something wrong, sir?

Slender: Em—no—yes.—Anyway, I scraped my knee fencing the other day. We were playing for a dish of stewed prunes, and ever since then I can't stand the smell of meat.—I heard your dogs barking. Are there bears in the town?

Anne: I heard there were.

Slender: It's a fine sport, bear-baiting—although I'm very much against it. Cruelty to animals, you know. If a bear got loose, you'd be afraid, wouldn't you?

Anne: Yes, indeed.

Slender: They are ugly, I suppose.

(Page returns.)

Page: Come on, Master Slender, we're waiting for you.

Anne: He says he doesn't want to eat.

Page: I'll have none of that. You'll come in and eat.

Slender: Oh, well, in that case, you first, sir.

Page: Never mind. Just go on in.

Slender: Mistress Anne, you go first.

Anne: No, no. Go on, sir.

Slender: I don't want to be impolite by preceding you.

Anne: No, please go ahead, sir.

Page: Enough of this.

(Page takes Slender by the elbow and marches him into the house, with Anne following.)

Slender: Thank you, sir. Much obliged.

(They leave.)

Act 1, Scene 2. *Same place. Evans brings Simple out of the house. Evans is wiping his lips with a napkin, so the suggestion is that dinner has just finished.*

Evans: I have a little errand for you, Simple—but an important one.

Simple: Yes, sir.

Evans: Do you know where Doctor Caius lives?

Simple: Only the general neighbourhood, sir.

Evans: Well, you go there and ask, and someone will direct you to the house. Now then, Doctor Caius has a housekeeper named Mistress Quickly. She's a friend of Anne's. You give her this letter. *(He gives Simple the letter.)*

Simple: Yes, sir.

Evans: We want to get Master Slender married off to Anne, but he's going to need a little help. I'm asking Mistress Quickly to help us. Understand?

Simple: Yes, sir.

Evans: Treat this as confidential.

Simple: I will, sir.

Evans: Good. Now off you go.

(Simple leaves and Evans goes back in the house.)

Act 1, Scene 3. *A room in the Garter Inn. Falstaff comes in with the Host, and lagging behind them are Bardolph, Nym, Pistol, and Robin. The opening conversation between Falstaff and the Host is spoken aside (that is, unheard by the others).*

Falstaff: These guys are costing me an arm and a leg.

Host: But they're your friends, and you're a knight, after all.

Falstaff: Big deal. Knights can go broke, too.

Host: Oh, I don't believe it.

Falstaff: No, seriously. I'm burning through ten pounds a week with all these guys. They expect me to pay for everything. Of course, Robin's my page, so I have to pay him. But do me a favour and take Bardolph off my hands. Hire him as a bartender. Okay?

Host: For you—done.

Falstaff (Normal voice): Bardolph, you've just been hired as a bartender.

Bardolph: Oh! Excellent! I love to serve booze!

Pistol (Aside to Nym): Almost as much as drinking it.

Nym (Aside to Pistol): If it wasn't for booze, he never would've been conceived.

Falstaff: You're on your way up. You've got a career.

Bardolph: A bartender!—Wow! *(To the Host)* Thanks! You won't regret it!

Falstaff: Okay, now get lost.

(Bardolph leaves with the Host.)

Falstaff: I'm glad to get rid of him. His thievery was getting to be an embarrassment. The guy's got no discretion.

Nym: A thief must have discretion. Like us—eh, Pistol?

Pistol: I'm not a thief. I'm merely an agent for the redistribution of wealth.

Falstaff: Boys, I have bad news. I'm almost broke.

Pistol: Suddenly I'm hungry.

Nym: Ha! You're funny.

Falstaff: Seriously, boys, I have to do something to get money.

Pistol: Like what—work?

Falstaff: Work! Oh, my God, don't ever say that word to me.—No, I mean more like, you know—scheme—con.

Nym: Exploit.

Falstaff: Yes.

Nym: Defraud—chisel—rip off—swindle—cheat—

Falstaff: Yes, yes, yes. Along those lines.

Pistol: So what's the deal?

Falstaff: Do you know Master Ford?

Pistol: Yes. He's got money.

Nym: And you want some of it.

Falstaff: Of course.

Nym: And how do you intend to get it?

Falstaff: I'm going to, shall we say, make love to his wife.

Pistol: Literally? Like boink her?

Falstaff: No, not literally. Just, you know, romance her. String her along. She's got access to her husband's money.

Pistol: And you think she likes you?

Falstaff: Hell, yes. A man of experience can always tell. All the signs are there—the little gestures, the looks, the way she speaks to me. I can practically read her mind. She's hot for me.

Nym: So what do you intend to do?

(Falstaff produces two letters.)

Falstaff: This letter goes to Mistress Ford.—And this one goes to Mistress Page.

Nym: Mistress Page? Are you going after her, too?

Falstaff: Yes. She's just as hot for me.

Pistol: I didn't realize we had so many hot women in Windsor.

Falstaff: They can't resist me. In fact, Mistress Page practically undresses me when she looks at me. You should see the way her eyes travel all over my body—even my belly.

Pistol: Your belly would keep a surveyor busy all day.

Nym: Ha! Good one!

Falstaff: Naturally, she has access to her husband's money, too. And I intend to work on both the wives.

Pistol: You're going to be a busy man, aren't you?

Falstaff: Whatever it takes. Now you fellows will deliver the letters for me. *(To Nym)* You'll take this letter to Mistress Page—*(To Pistol)* and you'll take this one to Mistress Ford.

(Pistol and Nym take the letters without enthusiasm and then put them on the table.)

Pistol: Are we supposed to be your pimps, then? Is that it?

Falstaff: Well—in a manner of speaking, I suppose.

Nym: What if I don't feel like being your pimp?

Falstaff: Why? Are you too good for that?

Pistol: It won't do our reputations any good.

Falstaff: What reputations?

Nym: He means, what little reputation we still have.

Falstaff: I don't know what you're talking about. You're supposed to be my friends. I practically support you. If I ask you to do something for me, just do it. I want you to deliver those letters.

Pistol: No.

Falstaff: What do you mean, no?

Nym: He means no—as in no. And that goes for me, too.

Falstaff: Well, to hell with you guys, then. I don't need you. Robin will deliver the letters.—Won't you, Robin? *(He gives Robin the letters.)*

Robin: Yes, Sir John.

Pistol: Congratulations, Robin. You've just been promoted from page to pimp.

Nym: Go to the brothels and do a deal with them. They'll pay you a commission for every customer you bring them.

Falstaff: Don't listen to them. This is life experience. It's good for you.

Robin: Yes, Sir John.

Falstaff: Let's go.—I'm through with you guys. And I'll be sure to tell the host on my way out not to bother to serve you because you can't pay. And I suggest you vacate this room for paying customers.—Come on, Robin.

(Falstaff and Robin leave.)

Pistol: Fat bastard.

Nym: What a prick. We should stick it to him.

Pistol: Like how?

Nym: Let's rat him out to the husbands. I'll go tell Page what he's up to, and you tell Ford.

Pistol: Good idea. That'll fix him.

Nym: Let's go.

(Pistol and Nym leave.)

Act 1, Scene 4. *In Doctor Caius's house. (The closet is either onstage or offstage.) Mistress Quickly comes in with Simple.*

Mist. Quickly: Yes, yes. Just wait. *(Calling)* John Rugby!

(Rugby comes in.)

Mist. Quickly: Go to the window and watch for Doctor Caius.

Rugby: Okay.

(Rugby goes out.)

Mist. Quickly: Now, then, you said your name was Peter Simple?

Simple: Yes, ma'am.

Mist. Quickly: And your Master Slender—is he the one with the big, bushy beard?

Simple: No, he's only got a little one.

Mist. Quickly: Ah. A mild-mannered fellow—yes?

Simple: Oh, yes, very mild-mannered. But brave. He once punched a gamekeeper—a fellow who kept rabbits.

Mist. Quickly: Ah, well! I'll remember him. Holds his head up very proudly, does he?

Simple: Yes, indeed.

Mist. Quickly: Then he's just the man for Anne Page. You tell Parson Evans I'll do what I can to put in a good word for Master Slender.

Simple: Thank you, ma'am.

(Rugby rushes in.)

Rugby: Doctor Caius is coming!

Mist. Quickly: Uh-oh! *(To Simple)* Quick! You hide in the closet till he's gone!

(Simple hides in the closet.)

Mist. Quickly: Why is he coming home at this hour?

(Rugby shrugs. She waves him out, and he leaves. She pretends to be nonchalant and hums or sings. Then Doctor Caius comes in. He speaks with a French accent.)

Caius: Pourquoi you be singing? Never mind that. Go get me the little green box from the closet.

Mist. Quickly: Closet?—Oh. Yes. Right away.

(She reaches into the closet and returns with the box.)

Caius: Where is Rugby? I need him.

Mist Quickly (Calling): Rugby!

(Rugby comes in.)

Rugby: Yes, sir.

Caius: Go get your rapier. You must escort me to the court. I have important business.

Rugby: Yes, sir. It's by the door.

Caius: Wait, I forgot something. In the closet.

(He goes to the closet, opens the door, and finds Simple.)

Caius (Angrily): Who are you? What you are doing in my closet? Are you a thief?

(He drags Simple out.)

Mist. Quickly: It's all right, sir. He's not a thief. He's an honest man.

Caius: No honest man would hide in my closet.

Mist. Quickly: Please, sir, don't be angry. He came here on an errand from Parson Evans.

Caius (To Simple): Oh, so Parson Evans sent you. What for?

Simple: Em, well, you see, I was sent to ask Mistress Quickly to–

Mist. Quickly: Shh!

Caius: Never mind the shush! Let him speak. *(To Simple)* You tell me.

Simple: Em, well, it's like this, sir. Parson Evans wanted me to ask your housekeeper to talk to Anne Page to put in a good word for my master, Master Slender, so he might marry her.

Mist. Quickly (Forcing a laugh): Ha, ha, ha! It's silly, isn't it? I wouldn't get involved in such a thing.

Caius (To Simple): Parson Evans have some nerve for that! I'll have a thing or two to say to him! You wait. I write him a letter.–Rugby, get me a pen and paper.

(Doctor Caius sits down at a table and Rugby returns with pen and paper. Caius writes, mumbling to himself. Mistress Quickly takes Simple aside and speaks to him confidentially.)

Mist Quickly: The doctor wants to marry Anne Page himself. But don't worry. She doesn't love him. You tell the parson I'll help your master.

(Doctir Caius seals the letter and hands it to Simple.)

Caius: You take this to Parson Evans. I challenge him to a duel. I will cut him to pieces for meddling in other people's business. I'll teach him. Now go.

Simple: Yes, sir.

(Simple leaves.)

Caius: I thought you tell me Anne Page will agree to marry me.

Mist. Quickly: She will, sir. You needn't worry about that.

Caius: That damn priest!–Rugby, you come with me. *(To Mistress Quickly)* You better be right.

(Doctor Caius and Rugby leave.)

Mist. Quickly: She won't marry him. I know Anne Page better than anyone else does.

Fenton (Within): Hello!

Mist. Quickly: Yes? Come in!

(Fenton comes in.)

Mist. Quickly: Ah, Master Fenton, I thought I recognized your voice. How nice to see you.

Fenton: Have you spoken to Anne Page about me?

Mist. Quickly: Oh, indeed, I have. I know she loves you. In fact, the last time I saw her she talked for an hour about the wart behind your ear.

Fenton: The wart?

Mist. Quickly: Yes. It's a sure sign she loves you. If she's so fascinated by a wart, imagine what she's thinking about the rest of you.

Fenton: Ah.—Well, I suppose that's good. I'm going to visit her today. Here's something to show my appreciation. *(He gives her some money.)* Please tell her good things about me.—You know—how I'd be perfect for her, and that sort of thing.

Mist. Quickly: Absolutely, sir. I'm on your side.—And thank you.

Fenton: Thank you. I must go now. Goodbye.

Mist Quickly: Goodbye, Master Fenton.

(Fenton leaves.)

Mist. Quickly: He's a nice young man. But Anne doesn't love him either. I always know what's in her mind.—Oh—must do something.

(She goes out.)

Act 2, Scene 1. *A street. Mistress Page comes in with a letter.*

Mist. Page: Ha! A love letter! At my age! *(She reads)* “Don't ask me to explain why I love you. I just do. Think of what we have in common. We are neither of us young, but we both like a bit of fun and a nice cup of wine. We were made for each other. Accept the love of this old soldier. Let me be your gallant knight, by day or night, or any kind of light, for you I'll fight, with all my might.—Sir John Falstaff.”—What a doofus! He hardly knows me and he expects me to fall for this bullshit? What a clown!

(Mistress Ford comes in.)

Mist. Ford: There you are, Mistress Page. I was just going to your house.

Mist. Page: Ah, Mistress Ford, I was just on my way to see you.—You look upset. What's the matter?

Mist. Ford: You won't believe this. I got this letter from Sir John Falstaff. *(She hands over the letter, and Mistress Page reads it.)* The nerve of that man! What evil storm beached that fat whale at Windsor? I'd like to fry him in his own body fat.

Mist. Page: Wait a minute. Read this.

(She gives Mistress Ford her own letter. The two ladies compare the letters.)

Mist Ford: It's the exact same letter.

Mist. Page: I'll bet he has a stack of them at home—all the same. Just fill in the blank space with some woman's name.

Mist. Ford: What a con artist. He must be after our money.

Mist. Page: What else? We should get some revenge on him.

Mist. Ford: Ohh—I don't know. I wouldn't want people to talk. My husband would get very upset. He's so jealous.

Mist. Page: Not my husband. Of course, I'd never give him any reason to be.—Oh—I think I see them coming.—Let's just step away for a moment and talk this over.

(The Wives leave. Then Ford comes in with Pistol, and Page with Nym.)

Ford: I certainly hope there's nothing to it.

Pistol: I'm telling you he intends to make a move on your wife.

Ford: But why? She's not a young woman.

Pistol: Doesn't matter to him. Young or old.

Nym (To Page): That's right. That's just the way he is. A regular sex fiend.

Pistol: You listen to Corporal Nym. He knows.—Anyway, gentlemen, I must leave you.

(Pistol leaves.)

Ford (Aside): I have to find out about this.

Nym (To Page): It's all true. Falstaff loves your wife. He wanted me to deliver the letter to her, but I refused. I'm much too honourable for that. And besides, he's been bad to me. So I'm glad to rat him out. You do whatever you have to do.—Goodbye.

(Nym leaves.)

Page (Aside, looking after Nym): I don't think I trust that guy.

Ford (Aside, looking after Nym): He seems honest to me.—If I find out it's true—

(The Wives return.)

Page: Ah—Meg!

Mist. Page: George, I must talk to you.

(The Pages move apart and talk privately.)

Mist. Ford (Warily): Frank—you look unhappy.

Ford: No, I'm not unhappy. Look, just go home, okay?

Mist. Ford: Oh, dear. You are unhappy.—Mistress Page?

Mist. Page: Yes. Coming. *(She sees Mistress Quickly coming and speaks aside to Mistress Ford.)* Mistress Quickly is coming. We'll use her as our messenger to Falstaff.

(Mistress Ford nods her agreement. Mistress Quickly comes in.)

Mist. Page: Mistress Quickly, how are you?

Mist. Quickly: Fine, thank you.

Mist. Page: Going to visit Anne?

Mist. Quickly: Yes, as a matter of fact.

Mist. Page: Fine. Come along with us. We want to talk to you about something.

(The three Ladies leave.)

Page: Well, Ford, what are you thinking?

Ford: I'm not sure. Do you think those fellows were telling the truth?

Page: I don't think so. They obviously have a grudge against Falstaff.

Ford: Are they servants of his?

Page: Not servants, just hangers-on.

Ford: Where does he hang out? At the Garter Inn?

Page: Yes. Listen, I wouldn't take any of this too seriously. If he tried to make advances to my wife, he'd only make a fool of himself.

Ford: I wouldn't let my wife anywhere near him. Not that I don't trust her.—Just—well, a man can't be too careful about these things. I'd be more concerned if I were you.

(The Host of the Garter Inn and Shallow come in, grinning.)

Page: You fellows look happy. What's up?

Host: There's going to be a duel. Do you want to come and watch?

Page: Who's duelling?

Shallow: Sir Hugh Evans and Doctor Caius.

Ford: Excuse me. *(To the Host)* Can I talk to you for a minute?

Host: Sure.

(Ford and the Host move apart.)

Shallow: The host of the Garter is officiating, so to speak. Do you want to come? We're planning a little joke.

Page: Oh, really? Tell me what.

(Page and Shallow move apart and talk.)

Host: Is there some quarrel between you and Falstaff?

Ford: No, no, no. Nothing like that. I just want you to introduce me to him—under a false name. I intend to disguise myself. My name will be Brook. It's just a friendly joke, that's all.

Host: By George, we're full of jokes today, aren't we? All right. No problem.—Master Shallow, are you coming?

Shallow: Yes, yes.

Page: I've heard the Frenchman is quite a swordsman.

Shallow: Ach!—Duelling isn't what it used to be. These days it's a lot of fancy rubbish—more like ballet. Now, when I was a young fellow—

Host: Yeah, yeah—

Shallow: No, seriously. When I was a young fellow, I could take on just about anybody. It's all in the heart.

Host (Laughing): In the heart. You bet. Okay, anyway, let's go.

Page: I'd rather hear them insult each other than fight. A Frenchman and a Welshman cursing at each other. That would be funny.—Ford, are you coming?

Ford: No, thanks.

Page: Well, I don't mind going, as long as it's a joke.—Let's go.

(Page, Shallow, and the Host leave.)

Ford: He trusts his wife too much. But I'm not taking any chances. I'm going to find out what's happening.

(Ford leaves.)

Act 2, Scene 2. *A room in the Garter Inn. Falstaff comes in, pursued by Pistol. A conversation is in progress.*

Pistol: Aw, come on, Sir John. Be a sport.

Falstaff: Forget it. You're not getting a penny from me.

Pistol: I'll pay it back.

Falstaff: You're a bad risk. I've already had to speak to your creditors three times to give you and Nym more time on your debts—otherwise you'd be in jail. And they were my friends, too. I had to lie to them. I said you were honest men and good soldiers. And when Mistress Bridget had her fan stolen, I swore on my honour that you didn't steal it.

Pistol: I shared with you on that, didn't I?

Falstaff: Never mind. If you need money, go back to picking pockets in your old ghetto. I have to live by my wits all the time to scrape by, and you won't deliver a lousy letter for me because it—offends your honour!

Pistol: Hey, I'm sorry. I'll do another favour for you if you want.

(Robin comes in.)

Robin: Sir John, there's a lady wishes to speak to you.

Falstaff: A lady? Oh. All right. Show her in.

(Robin signals and Mistress Quickly comes in.)

Mist. Quickly: Good morning, your worship.

Falstaff: Yes, madam, what can I do for you?

Mist. Quickly: I've come with a message, sir.—Em, it's confidential.

Falstaff: Oh? All right, then.

(Falstaff and Mistress Quickly move apart. Robin and Pistol are not hearing the following conversation.)

Mist. Quickly: I'm Doctor Caius's housekeeper, but I'm sent by Mistress Ford, sir.

Falstaff: Yes, yes—and?

Mist. Quickly: A fine lady she is, sir.

Falstaff: Yes, yes—and?

Mist. Quickly: You are a rascal, aren't you, sir? Well, heaven forgive you.

Falstaff: Never mind that. What about Mistress Ford?

Mist. Quickly: She's got her knickers in a knot, you might say. On account of you, sir.

Falstaff: Does she now?—Em, could you be more specific?

Mist. Quickly: There's many a man has tried his luck with her—including some high-born ones. Lords. Why, she's gotten I don't know how many letters and gifts. But she doesn't give those gentlemen the time of day. You, on the other hand, have charmed her out of her socks, you might say. She's all excited over your letter. Can hardly contain herself. She thanks you so much. And she says that her husband will be out of the house between ten and eleven tomorrow—morning, of course.

Falstaff: Ah! Indeed!

Mist. Quickly: Yes. And you may come and view the, uh, picture that you admired so much.

Falstaff: I understand.

Mist. Quickly: She's an unhappy wife, sir. Her husband is so jealous. And she's so lonely.

Falstaff: It's a common problem these days. I'm well aware.

Mist. Quickly: Ain't it the truth.

Falstaff: You tell her I'll be there tomorrow.

Mist. Quickly: Very good, sir.—And I have another message for you—from Mistress Page.

Falstaff: Mistress Page!

Mist. Quickly: She sends her warmest greetings. A good lady. Very virtuous. Never misses church. She wants you to know her husband is around most of the time, so she doesn't know when she can meet you, but she hopes she'll be able to soon. She's keen for you, sir. You must know all the right words, I'm sure.

Falstaff: I have the right body. That's what it is.

Mist. Quickly: I have no doubt of it, sir.

Falstaff: Now tell me—Mistress Ford and Mistress Page—have they told each other that they love me?

Mist. Quickly: Certainly not, sir. They're both keeping it to themselves. Mistress Page says you can send your boy as a messenger between the two of you, and her husband won't be suspicious. He trusts her. She's lucky that way.

Falstaff: That's good for her—and me, too. You tell her my page, Robin, will be our messenger.

Mist. Quickly (Aside to him): You can use code words so the boy doesn't know what it's all about. We don't want to corrupt the young, after all, do we, sir?

Falstaff: No. Not unless it's absolutely necessary. Thank you, madam.—Oh—wait a minute—*(He reaches into his pocket for a coin.)* For your kind service.

Mist. Quickly: Thank you, sir.

Falstaff: Robin, you go with this lady.

Robin: Yes, Sir. John.

(Mistress Quickly and Robin leave.)

Pistol (Aside): I like her! I'd like to get between her legs!

(Pistol leaves.)

Falstaff: Ah! I've still got it after all these years! *(Thumps his belly in satisfaction)* Cast iron! Sir John Falstaff—Windsor's red-hot lover!

(Bardolph comes in holding a bottle of wine.)

Bardolph: Sir John, there's a gentleman named Brook wishes to speak to you.

Falstaff: Brook? Don't think I know him.

Bardolph: He's bought you this bottle of wine as a courtesy.

Bardolph: Then he's my friend. Show him in.

(Falstaff takes the bottle and puts it on the table. Bardolph goes out and Ford, disguised as Brook, comes in.)

Ford: Sir John Falstaff!

Falstaff: Master Brook!

Ford: Forgive my barging in like this.

Falstaff: Not at all. You're most welcome.

Ford: Sir John, you don't know me, but I know you by reputation—as a soldier, a scholar—and a man.

Falstaff: Ha, ha, ha! Quite so!

Ford: I have a favour to ask, and since I am a man of means, I will not hesitate to reward you generously for your services.

(Ford takes out a bag of money and puts it on the table.)

Falstaff: Then I am your servant, sir!

Ford: Sir John, you are the only one who can help me.—And if I confess to certain faults, I'm sure you will sympathize and not judge me too harshly.

Falstaff: I'm on your side, Master Brook—whatever your business is.

Ford: Now, sir, to get down to cases. There is a certain lady I have a crush on. She's married, as it happens. Her husband's name is Ford.

(Ford pauses to see how Falstaff reacts. Falstaff is wide-eyed for a moment but contains himself.)

Falstaff: Go on. I'm listening.

Ford: Now, as to this Ford lady. I've had absolutely no luck with her. I've sent her gifts and letters, but she totally ignores me.

Falstaff: Ah.—And how can I help?

Ford: It's like this. She maintains the appearance of being very virtuous, very proper—you know, the good, faithful wife. Nevertheless—as I have heard—she has another side to her—a more, shall we say, naughty side? Eh? Know what I mean?

Falstaff: I certainly do.

Ford: Yes, yes, yes, I'm sure you do—ha, ha! You're a man of the world, are you not?

Falstaff: I've never denied it.

Ford: Therefore, sir, my proposition to you is this. I want you to try to romance her. If anyone can, it's you. I'll make it worth your while. *(Indicates the bag of money)* There's more where that came from.

Falstaff: Ah. Well. Your proposition is certainly agreeable. But I don't see how it helps your cause if I make love to the lady you have a crush on.

Ford: I'll explain it. It's all about this pretense she has of being very proper. That's the barrier I have to break through. If you can succeed in, shall we say, compromising her somewhat, then I'd have an argument I could use for my benefit. How can she reject me if she's willing to cheat on her husband with you? She'd have no more pretense, no excuses. Get it?

Falstaff: Ah. Yes. I see. Very clever. Master Brook, leave it to me. It's as good as done. As a matter of fact, by an extraordinary coincidence, I have a secret tryst arranged with the lady tomorrow. Between ten and eleven, to be precise.

Ford: Do you now!

Falstaff: Yes. Her stupid husband will be out of the house. If you come and see me tomorrow evening, I expect I shall have a very favourable report to give you. After that, she's all yours.

Ford: Wonderful!—Em, by the way, do you happen to know Ford at all?

Falstaff: Not personally. But I understand he's a jerk. But all that matters to me is that he's got money. And I intend to squeeze his wife a bit to get some of it. You don't mind, do you?

Ford: No, not at all. I just hope you don't run into him. After all, you don't know what he looks like.

Falstaff: Oh, I'm not afraid of him. I'd just stare him down and he'd probably faint. I'm sure he's got the mind of a peasant and the spine of a jellyfish. Master Brook, you come back tomorrow evening. *(He picks up the bag of money.)* Right now, I have some business to take care of. You can sit here and relax as long as you like.

Ford: Thank you.

(They shake hands and Falstaff leaves.)

Ford: That son of a bitch!—The spine of a jellyfish, eh?—Well, this proves I was right to be jealous. Good thing I found all this out. If she thinks she can meet a man behind my back—Wait till I catch them in the act.—And Page will have to admit I was right. He'll smarten up.—The mind of a peasant, eh?—Oh, I'll get him!

(Ford leaves.)

Act 2, Scene 3. *A field. Curtain up reveals Doctor Caius pacing back and forth impatiently as Rugby stands by.*

Caius: What time is it, Rugby?

Rugby: It's past the hour, sir. Sir Hugh is late.

Caius: Ha! Better for him if he not show up at all. Otherwise, I kill him.

Rugby: He probably realizes that, sir.

(The Host, Shallow, Slender, and Page come in.)

Host: Hello, doctor!

Others: Hello, doctor!

Caius: What? All four of you come to watch?

Host: Yes, to see you make use of your nefarious French swordsmanship.

Caius: Nefarious? What is that?

Host: Brilliant.

Caius: Ah, yes—brilliant. Nefarious. I am that, too.

Host: That parson should be mighty afraid of you. After all, you are the Castilian King Urinal.

Caius: Eh? What is that? My English is not perfect.

Host: The king of beasts. The lion of the medical profession.

Caius: Oui. Merci. You are kind to say so. I be the King Urinal for him if he dare to show up. But he is not come, that coward.

Shallow: It's for the best, doctor. After all, he is a healer of souls and you are a healer of the body. You shouldn't fight.—Don't you agree, Master Page?

Page: I do, indeed, Master Shallow. And I know you yourself used to be formidable with a sword, but now you're a man of peace.

Shallow: What do you mean, used to be? I could still hold my own if I had to, believe me. We all keep a bit of the youthful spirit, no matter how old we get.

Page: Indeed, sir.

Shallow: Now, my good Master Doctor Caius, for the sake of peace I've come to take you home.

Caius: But my honour, sir.

Host: Your honour is beyond question. Your reputation as a mutt is well-known.

Caius: A mutt? What is that?

Host: Champion. Brave fellow.

Caius: Ah! Thank you.

Host: And Parson Evans will be sure to eviscerate you when he sees you.

Caius: Eviscerate? What is that?

Host: Make up with you. Apologize.

Caius: Ah. Good. He better eviscerate me, or else.

Host: He will.—Excuse me. (*Aside to the others*) You fellows go on to Frogmore and wait for us.

Page (Aside to the Host): Is that where Evans is?

Host (Aside to Page): Yes. I told him the duel would be there. You go and keep him occupied. I'll take the doctor there on a pretext.

Page (Aside to the Host): Right.—Doctor, we'll see you later.

Caius: Okay. Goodbye.

(*Page, Shallow, and Slender leave.*)

Host: Doctor, there's no point waiting any longer for Parson Evans. If you come with me, I can take you to where Anne Page is.

Caius: Where?

Host: Frogmore. She's having dinner there. I'll bring you right to her, all right?

Caius: Very good! Thank you! I will send all my gentlemen patients to your inn.

Host: And I will be your messenger to Anne Page.

Caius: Parfait! Merci!—Rugby, come on.

(*The Host, Caius, and Rugby leave.*)

Act 3, Scene 1. *A field at Frogmore. Evans and Simple come in. Simple is leading, and Evans seems lost.*

Evans: Are you sure this is where I'm supposed to duel Doctor Caius?

Simple: Yes, sir. The host of the Garter has arranged it.

Evans: So where's Caius?

Simple: I don't know, sir. I've looked everywhere except the road into town.

Evans: Then go look there.

Simple: Yes, sir.

(*Simple leaves.*)

Evans: No bloody French doctor is going to challenge me and get away with it. I'll knock his brains out.—In a Christian way, of course.

(*Simple returns.*)

Simple: Some people are coming, sir—Master Slender, Master Shallow, and Master Page.

Evans: Oh!

(*Evans takes out his Bible and pretends to be reading as Shallow, Slender, and Page come in.*)

Shallow: There's our good parson.—Reading your Bible, eh?

Evans: Of course.

Page: Now, my good parson. We've come to do you a favour.

Evans: Like what?

Page: There's a certain fellow back there (*Indicating with a nod of his head*) who's in an awful state of mind because he thinks he's been wronged.

Shallow: It's totally out of character for him. He's a learned man and quite a decent fellow.

Evans: And whom would you be referring to?—As if I couldn't guess.

Page: Master Doctor Caius, the renowned French physician.

Evans: Renowned French physician!—Ptoo! (*He spits.*) He's a quack and a knave and a coward! Bring him here and I'll deal with him!

Shallow: Uh-oh. Keep them apart.

(The Host comes in with Caius and Rugby. Evans and Caius immediately get in each other's faces and are separated by the others.)

Page: Now, now, parson, don't draw your sword.

Shallow: The same for you, doctor.

Host: Take their weapons. (*The others disarm Evans and Caius.*) This way if they hack away at each other, the only harm they'll do is to the English language.

(The others laugh, and Evans and Caius begin to realize they've been pranked.)

Caius (To Evans): So—you are not duelling me?

Evans: Later. (*Aside to Caius*) They're laughing at us. You pretend to be angry, and so will I. We'll make up with each other later. (*Normal voice*) You rogue! You coward! Showing up late for your own duel!

Caius: Me? Late? I waited for you, and you didn't show up! You're the coward!

Evans: I waited for you! Right here!

Host: Okay, okay, stop the argument. I had you guys wait in different places. After all, we wouldn't want to lose either one of you. Pretty good joke, eh?—Ha, ha!—Now, why don't you guys sit down over a bottle of wine and agree to be friends, okay? We'll keep your swords for the time being.—Okay, fellows, let's go.

(The Host leaves with Shallow, Slender, and Page.)

Caius: So—we are the two fools for their amusement.

Evans: I'm afraid so.

Caius: He told me he was bringing me to Anne Page. Some joke!

Evans: Now I'm more angry with him than I am with you.

Caius: The same with me.

Evans: So what do you say we stick it to him?

Caius: Stick it to him? What is that?

Evans: Get even. Play a joke on him.

Caius: Ah! Now you talk good English!

(Evans and Caius leave.)

Act 3, Scene 2. *A street in Windsor. Mistress page walks in with Robin.*

Mist Page: Robin, if you listen to me, you'll get ahead in this world.

Robin: Yes, ma'am.

Mist. Page: I'll be nicer to you than Sir John is. You'll see.

Robin: Yes, ma'am.

(Ford comes in.)

Ford: Mistress Page, where are you off to?

Mist. Page: I'm just on my way to see your wife, as a matter of fact. I assume she's home.

Ford: Yes—all alone and no doubt wanting company.—Where'd you find him?

Mist. Page: He belongs to a friend of my husband.—Em—*(Pretends not being able to remember)*—what's his name again?

Robin: Sir John Falstaff.

Ford: Oh.—Sir John Falstaff.—Indeed.

Mist. Page: Well, we'll be on our way, then, Master page. Goodbye.

Page: Goodbye.

(Mistress Page and Robin go out.)

Ford: That fool Page! Doesn't he realize what's going on? He's practically throwing his wife at Falstaff. And she's obviously willing. What a cheeky fellow. Thinks he can shoot two birds with one shot. He'll make cuckolds of us both unless I stop him. *(The clock strikes ten.)* Ten o'clock. Falstaff will be there. I'll catch him red-handed.

(Page, Shallow, Slender, the Host, Evans, Caius, and Rugby come in.)

The Party: Good morning, Master Ford.

Ford: Well! Half of Windsor is here. I was just heading home. Care to come along?

Shallow: Some other time.

Slender: We're supposed to meet Anne for lunch.

Shallow: We're trying to fix them up (*Nodding toward Slender*).

Ford: Ah. I understand.

Slender (To Page): I'm hoping.

Page: I'm all for you, Master Slender. (*To Ford*) Although my wife favours the good doctor here.

Caius: I know Anne cares for me. My housekeeper has assured me.

Host: Don't forget Master Fenton. He's a fine fellow. He has all the social graces. He's rubbed shoulders with royalty, you know.

Page: I know all about that. He hung around with Prince Hal and his gang of rowdies. [*Author's note: Nickname of Henry V as a young prince.*] Fenton has social rank, all right, but unfortunately not the money that should go with it. I'm not giving my daughter away to a fortune-seeker.

Ford: Well, I can see you have a lot to discuss. But if any of you care to come home with me for lunch, I promise you a big surprise. You'll see me catch a monster.

Page: A monster?—Ha, ha!

Shallow: Master Slender and I will pass. But you go ahead and catch your monster. I'm sure we'll hear all about it—ha, ha!

(Shallow and Slender leave.)

Caius: Rugby, you go home. I'll be home soon.

Rugby: Yes, sir.

(Rugby leaves.)

Host: I'll be getting back to the pub—to have a drink with my friend Sir John Falstaff.

Others: Goodbye.

(The Host leaves.)

Ford (Aside, mockingly): Sir John Falstaff! (*Makes a face*)—Well, how about you fellows? Coming home with me?

Others: Yes.—Sure.—Show us the monster!—Ha!

(They all leave.)

Act 3, Scene 3. *The Ford house. Mistresses Ford and Page come in.*

Mist. Ford (Calling): John!—Robert!

(Servants John and Robert come in with a large laundry basket, which they set on the floor.)

Mist. Ford: Now remember, when I call you, you pick up the basket and carry it out. It'll be heavy, but don't stagger. It has to look normal. You take the basket to the river and dump the laundry in the ditch for washing. Understand?

John and Robert: Yes, ma'am.

Mist. Ford: Good. Now go and wait.

(John and Robert go out. Then Robin comes in.)

Robin: Mistress Ford, Sir John is at the back door.

Mist. Page: You haven't given us away, have you?

Robin: No, ma'am. You're my friend. I wouldn't do that.

Mist. Page: Good. *(To Mistress Ford)* I'll go hide.

Mist. Ford: Remember your cue.—Robin, let Sir John in.

(Mistress Page and Robin go out separately. Then Falstaff comes in.)

Falstaff: My heavenly jewel! My buttercup! My angel on earth! At last!

Mist. Ford: Oh, Sir John!

Falstaff: Mistress Ford, forgive me for saying so, but if only your husband were out of the way, I'd make you a real lady—the wife of a knight.

Mist. Ford: I'm afraid I'd be a poor excuse for a lady.

Falstaff: Ha! If you were in France, all the men in the court would lose their minds over you.

Mist. Ford (Laughing): You flatter me, Sir John!

Falstaff: You were meant for the noble life. I can see it even if nobody else can.

Mist. Ford (Laughing): Oh, Sir John!

Falstaff: If it weren't so, I wouldn't be so madly in love with you.

Mist. Ford: I don't believe it. I think perhaps Mistress Page is the one you love.

Falstaff: Mistress Page?—Pfoof!—It hurts my eyes just to look at her.

Mist. Ford: Well, I'm glad to hear that because I certainly love you.

Robin (Within, calling): Mistress Ford, Mistress Page is at the door! She says it's urgent!

Falstaff: Uh-oh! I don't want her to find me here.

Mist. Ford: Hide behind the drapery.

(Falstaff hides behind the drapery. [Author's note: The original refers to an arras, which is a wall hanging or tapestry.] Then Mistress Page comes in with Robin.)

Mist. Page: Your husband's on his way with half the officers of Windsor!

Mist. Ford: Whatever for?

Mist. Page: He thinks you've got a man here. I know you don't, but—just in case—you'd better get him out quick.

Mist. Ford: Oh, dear!—I do have a gentleman friend here. I'm not worried about myself, of course, but I hate to think what my husband might do to him!

Mist. Page: You must get him out now!—The laundry basket!

Mist. Ford: I don't think he'll fit.

(Falstaff jumps out of hiding.)

Falstaff: Oh, hell! Get me out of here!

(Falstaff jumps in the laundry basket. Mistress Page pretends to be surprised.)

Mist. Page: Sir John! *(Aside to him)* I thought you loved me.

Falstaff (Aside to Mist. Page): I do, I do! Just get me out of here!

(The Wives cover him over with the laundry.)

Mist. Page (To Falstaff in the basket): You liar.

Mist. Ford: John!—Robert!

(Mistress Ford signals Robin to leave, which he does. John and Robert come in and pick up the laundry basket.)

Mist. Ford: You know where to take it. Hurry!

(John and Robert and just starting to carry the basket out when Ford, Page, Caius, and Evans come in.)

Ford (To his party): Now you'll see what I'm talking about! And if I'm wrong, you can laugh at me all you want. *(To the Servants)* Where are you going?

John and Robert: To the laundress.

Ford: Oh.—Well, go on, then.

(John and Robert leave, carrying the basket.)

Ford (To his party): I'll guard the door so he can't get out that way. You fellows search the house.

Page: Aren't you taking this a bit too far?

Ford: You'll see that I'm not.

(Ford moves offstage to the door as the others go out to search. When they are all gone, the Wives laugh.)

Mist. Ford: Did you see the look on Falstaff's face?

Mist. Page: He probably wet himself in the basket!

Mist. Ford: Then he'll be glad to see the laundress, won't he?

(Both laugh.)

Mist. Page: Your husband's going to look like a fool.

Mist. Ford: Serves him right for being so jealous.—He must have known Falstaff would be here.

Mist. Page: He bumped into me and Robin on our way over.—Listen, we should have some more fun with Falstaff and your husband.

Mist. Ford: Yes, why not? We can send Mistress Quickly with another message for Falstaff and set him up for another prank.

Mist. Page: Yes, yes. Tell him if he comes back tomorrow you'll make it up to him for what happened today.

Mist. Ford: That's just what I was thinking.

(Ford, Page, Caius, and Evans return.)

Page: There's nobody. I think you imagined the whole thing.

Ford: Maybe he was afraid to come.

Mist. Page: Master Ford, don't you trust your wife?

Mist. Ford: My feelings are very hurt.

Ford (Embarrassed): Well—

Mist. Page: Shame on you.

Ford: Well—maybe I was wrong.

Evans: You were, sir.

Caius: Yes. We looked everywhere.

Page: I told you.

(A pause for effect. Ford is embarrassed and deflated.)

Ford: All right. I'm a fool. Go ahead, laugh at me. *(To his Wife)* I'm sorry. *(To Mistress Page)* And I apologize to you, too.

Page: We'll save our mocking for tomorrow, how's that? You fellows can come to my house for breakfast, and afterwards we'll do a little bird-hunting, all right?

Others: Yes.—Fine.

Evans (Aside to Caius): Don't forget. We're still going to get even with the host of the Garter.

Caius (Aside to Evans): Yes.

(Page, Caius, and Evans leave.)

Act 3, Scene 4. *In front of Page's house. Fenton comes in with Anne Page.*

Fenton: Your father won't give me a chance. He thinks I'm just after your money.

Anne: Maybe you are.

Fenton: Aw, come on. Look, maybe I got interested at first because of that. But once I got to know you, I loved you for what you are. I don't care about money.

Anne: Don't give up on my father.—Come, let's talk it over.

(Fenton and Anne move apart to talk. Then Shallow, Slender, and Mistress Quickly come in.)

Shallow (To Mist. Quickly): Tell Anne my nephew wants to talk to her.

(Mistress Quickly goes to interrupt Anne and Fenton.)

Slender: What'll I say?

Shallow: Just talk to her.

Mist. Quickly: Excuse me, Master Fenton.—Anne, Master Slender would have a word with you.

(Anne approaches Shallow and Slender.)

Shallow (To Slender): Your father would know what to say to a young lady if he were in your place.

Slender: My father—ha, ha! He was funny.—Mistress Anne, my uncle should tell you about the time my father stole two geese—

Shallow (Interrupting with a subtle kick to Slender): Mistress Anne, my nephew loves you.

Slender: Em—yes—as much as any lady in Gloucestershire.—Perhaps other counties, too, although I don't know them very well.

Shallow: He'll support you like a lady.

Slender: Yes. Wife of a squire. That's what you'll be.

Shallow: He'll pledge you a hundred and fifty pounds up front.

Anne: I'm sure he can speak for himself, Master Shallow.—Now, then, Master Slender, what is your will?

Slender: My will? Oh, goodness, I haven't made out a will yet—ha, ha.

Anne: No, I mean, what do you want with me?

Slender: Oh.—Well—you see, my uncle and your father have more or less agreed—on me, that is—to marry you. And if it happens, I'll be very happy. And if not, well—good luck to whoever.—No hard feelings, eh?—That is—

(Shallow gives Slender another kick to shut him up. Just then, Page and his Wife come in.)

Page: Ah, here's Master Slender.—Well, Anne, what do you say? You'll marry him, won't you?—What's Fenton doing here?—Fenton, didn't I tell you to give it up? My daughter's not for you.

Fenton: If you'd just give me a chance—

Mist. Page: I'm sorry, Master Fenton, but she's not for you.

Fenton: But, madam—sir—

Page: Master Shallow—Master Slender—let's go inside.—Fenton, there's no point in you hanging around here. You can take a hint, can't you?

(Page, Shallow, and Slender go in the house.)

Mist Quickly (Aside to Fenton): Talk to her mother.

Fenton: Mistress Page, I love your daughter. I really do.

Anne: Mother, don't marry me off to Slender. I really have no interest in him.

Mist. Page: I certainly won't, if I have my way. You can do better than him.

Mist Quickly: Like Doctor Caius?

Mist. Page: Yes.

Anne: No, not him either.

Mist. Page: Master Fenton, for my daughter's sake, I'll agree to be neutral. I will talk things over with her. But in the meantime you mustn't hang around here or my husband will be angry.

Fenton: Yes, madam. Thank you.—Goodbye, Anne.

(Mistress Page and Anne go in the house.)

Mist Quickly: Don't you worry, Master Fenton. You'll marry her—thanks to me.

Fenton: Thank you. I appreciate it.—Here. Give Anne this ring. *(He takes a ring off his finger.)* And this is for your service. *(He gives her some money.)*

Mist. Quickly: Thank you, sir. Now you run along and don't worry about anything.

(Fenton leaves.)

Mist. Quickly: Everyone's paying me to help them marry Anne. I can't lose on this deal no matter who she marries.—Ah! Must go see Sir John Falstaff. The wives aren't finished with him.

(She leaves.)

Act 3, Scene 5. *A room in the Garter Inn. Falstaff comes in, frowning, followed by Bardolph.*

Falstaff: Bring me a quart of sack.

Bardolph: Sure thing.

(Bardolph goes out.)

Falstaff: Of all the indignities!—To be dumped into the river!—I almost drowned!—I'll be damned if I let them pull another trick like that on me!

(Bardolph returns with a bottle.)

Bardolph: Mistress Quickly is here. She wants to speak to you.

Falstaff (Muttering): Mistress Quickly.—All right.

(Bardolph signals on his way out, and Mistress Quickly comes in as Falstaff is pouring himself some wine.)

Mist. Quickly: Good morning, Sir John!

Falstaff: Bah!

Mist. Quickly: Mistress Ford sent me.

Falstaff: Never heard of her.

Mist. Quickly: Oh, sir, she's so sorry about what happened. It was entirely a misunderstanding. Her servants misconstrued her.

Falstaff: So did I!

Mist. Quickly: Oh, sir, she wants to make it up to you. Her husband will be out birding this morning. She says you're to come to see her between eight and nine.

Falstaff: Seriously?

Mist. Quickly: Yes. She promises to make it up to you.

Falstaff: Well—all right. Tell her I'll be there.

Mist. Quickly: Ah, that's good, sir. I'll go at once. Goodbye.

(Mistress Quickly leaves.)

Falstaff: Where the hell is that guy Brook? He told me he'd be here.

(Ford comes in disguised as Brook.)

Ford: Good morning, Sir John! Sorry I couldn't come last evening.

Falstaff: That's quite all right, Master Brook. I'm sure you want to hear what happened yesterday at Ford's house.

Ford: Yes, indeed. Tell me everything.

Falstaff: Well, I was there at the appointed hour.

Ford: And how did it go?

Falstaff: Not too well, I'm afraid. I was just at the point of getting it on with the old girl when her husband showed up with a whole gang of people. He was convinced she was seeing someone and he and his friends were determined to kill me.

Ford: Oh, my goodness! How did you escape?

Falstaff: By a combination of luck and wits. Her friend, Mistress Page, arrived just in time to warn us, and I jumped into a laundry basket and got carried out by the servants.

Ford: Now that was lucky!

Falstaff: Yes, but what a smell! I swear, I don't know why dirty laundry should smell so bad. One expects better from the middle class. Anyway, that bastard Ford almost opened the basket to check, but he didn't, and the servants got me out. They took me to Datchet Lane, where they do the laundry.

Ford: Ah, good for you.

Falstaff: Good? Well, I'm lucky to be alive, if that's what you mean. I almost died three deaths. First, I almost got caught by Ford. Second, I had to squeeze so tight into that basket I thought my bones would break. And third, I almost died from the smell. And after that, when I got dumped into the river, I almost drowned. So that makes four deaths I barely escaped.

Ford: What an ordeal!

Falstaff: I hope you appreciate what I went through to try to do you a favour.

Ford: Yes, I certainly appreciate it. And I'm sorry you suffered so much.—So then, you're giving up?

Falstaff: Giving up? Hell, no. Sir John Falstaff never gives up. Why, I'd sooner jump into a volcano than give up when I'm—this close *(Indicates with fingers)*. It so happens that I've received a message from Mistress Ford that I can go see her between eight and nine this morning. Her stupid husband will be out bird-hunting.

Ford: It's after eight already.

Falstaff: What!—Oh, God, I have to go. Listen, em—come back, em—whenever—at your leisure—and I'll give you a full report. Don't worry about a thing. She's practically yours. Must go. See you later.

(Falstaff rushes out.)

Ford: So!—To think I almost caught that bastard yesterday. Instead, I got ridiculed by my friends. Well, he won't get away from me a second time—unless the devil shrinks him small enough to hide in a salt shaker.—And even then I'll check the salt shaker.

(Ford goes out.)

Act 4, Scene 1. *This scene is deleted.*

Act 4, Scene 2. *In Ford's house. Mistress Ford and Falstaff come in. The laundry basket is present again.*

Falstaff: So it was all a misunderstanding, then?

Mist. Ford: Yes, Sir John. It's my fault. I'm sorry.

Falstaff: Then I'm a happy guy again. And when I say I love you, I mean, like, totally. Everything I have is yours—and vice-versa.

Mist. Ford: Of course.

Falstaff: And your husband's out birding?

Mist. Ford: Yes. Finally, we can be alone.

Mist. Page (Within): Yoo-hoo! Mistress Ford!

Mist. Ford: Oh, dear, it's Page again. Better hide.

(Falstaff goes out. Mistress Page comes in.)

Mist. Page: There you are, dearie. Is anyone else at home?

Mist. Ford: Just the hired help.

Mist. Page: That's good.

Mist. Ford (Hushed voice): Speak louder. *(She jerks her thumb to indicate where Falstaff is.)*

Mist. Page (Louder): It's a good thing you don't have Sir John Falstaff here.

Mist. Ford: Oh? Why?

Mist. Page: Your husband's all riled up again. He swears you sneaked Falstaff out in the laundry basket, and he's brought his friends back to search the house again. He seems to think Falstaff is here.

Mist. Ford: Uh-oh. Where is my husband now?

Mist. Page: Just down the road. He and his friends will be here any second. Why? Is something wrong?

Mist. Ford: Yes. I'm in trouble now. Falstaff is here.

Mist. Page: Oh, no! Your husband will kill him! You've got to get him out!

Mist. Ford: How? In the laundry basket?

(Falstaff comes in frantically.)

Falstaff: No way! I'm not getting in there again!

Mist. Page: Why, Sir John! What are you doing here?

Falstaff: Em—I just came back to look for a lost button. What'll I do? Can I run out the back?

Mist. Page: No. They'll be watching the whole house. And they're armed with pistols.

Falstaff: Oh, God! Where can I hide?

Mist. Ford: There's no place. My husband will search every square inch of the house.

Falstaff: Well, think of something, for God's sake!

Mist. Page: Disguise him—as a lady!

Mist. Ford: Yes! My housekeeper's aunt left a dress upstairs. She's a fat lady, so it'll fit him.

Mist. Page: Your housekeeper's aunt? Isn't she the witch of Brainford?

Mist. Ford: Yes, that's what everyone calls her. She tells fortunes and does spells—that sort of thing.

Mist. Page: And your husband allows her to come here?

Mist. Ford: Not any more. She's barred from the house. He says he won't allow any witches in here.

Falstaff: Witch or no witch, if that dress will fit me, it's my only hope!

Mist. Ford: Go upstairs to the housekeeper's room. The dress is in the closet. And find a scarf or something to cover your head with.

Falstaff: Right!

(Falstaff rushes out.)

Mist. Ford: Is my husband really coming?

Mist. Page: Yes.

Mist. Ford: How did he find out about the laundry basket?

Mist. Page: I don't know.

Mist. Ford: Well, we'll have some fun with him. I'll have my boys carry out the basket again, and we'll see what he does. You go upstairs and help Sir John with his disguise.

Mist. Page: Okay.

(Mistress Page goes out.)

Mist. Ford (Calling): John!—Robert!

(John and Robert come in.)

Mist. Ford: Pick up the laundry basket and take it out. If your master stops you, just obey him. I'm going upstairs.

(Mistress Ford goes out.)

Robert: I hope that fat bastard isn't in here again. I almost got a hernia lifting him up yesterday.

John: Come on.

(They pick up the basket and are just starting to leave when Ford, Page, Shallow, Caius, and Evans come in. Ford is carrying a stick.)

Ford: Hold it! Put down that basket! *(The Servants put it down. To the others)* Now you'll see what tricks they're up to.—*(Calling)* Wife, come down!

Page: Really, Master Ford.

Evans: This is crazy.

Shallow: You're being silly, Master Ford.

Ford: You think so? Just wait. The villain is right inside here.

(Mistress Ford returns.)

Mist. Ford: What's the matter now?

Ford: Sending out the laundry, eh?

Mist. Ford: Yes.

Ford: And it's just laundry. Nobody hiding in the basket, eh?

Mist. Ford: No.

Ford: Ha! *(To the others)* Watch this!

(Ford opens the basket and starts pulling the laundry out.)

Page: Really, sir!

Ford: He's in here! I know he is!

(Ford turns the basket over, spilling everything out.)

Page: There's nobody.

Shallow: And you suspected your wife of cheating on you? Shame on you!

Evans: Pray for your sanity, sir.

Ford (Angrily to his Wife): Where is he?

Page: He's in your imagination, that's where.

Ford: I know he's somewhere in the house. He has to be. I want you guys to search.

Page: Not again!

Ford (To the Servants): Get this out of here!

(John and Robert put the laundry back in the basket and carry it out.)

Caius: I should prescribe you something for your nerves.

Page: Yes, I think you should.

Mist. Ford (Calling): Mistress Page, bring the lady down!

Ford: What lady?

Mist. Ford: The old lady of Brainford. The housekeeper's aunt. You know.

Ford: That witch?

Mist. Ford: Yes.

Ford: Didn't I say she was never to set foot in this house again? Where is that devil-worshiper? I'll give her a spell with this! *(Indicating the stick)*

Mist. Ford: Now, now, you wouldn't hit an old lady.

Ford: Oh, wouldn't I!

(Falstaff, disguised in women's clothes, comes in with Mistress Page.)

Mist. Page: Come along, Mother Prat.—She's just leaving.

Ford: Out of my house, witch!

(Ford strikes Falstaff with his stick. Falstaff runs out, yelping in a high-pitched voice.)

Mist. Page: Oh, no, Master Ford! She's just an old lady !

Ford: They ought to hang her!—Damned witch!

Evans: I could have sworn she had a beard.

Ford: Eh?

Evans: Under her scarf. She had a beard just like a man.

Ford: That's him! Come on!

(Ford runs out, followed by the other Men.)

Mist. Page: I don't think Falstaff will be coming around again.

Mist. Ford: I should think not. Should we tell the husbands what we did?

Mist. Page: Yes, I think so—just so they understand we're honest wives.

Mist. Ford: I wonder what they'll do to him. Probably some sort of public humiliation.

Mist. Page: He deserves it.—Come, let's follow them.

(They leave.)

Act 4, Scene 3. *In the Garter Inn. The Host is wiping a table or otherwise being busy when Bardolph comes in. (Author's note: Caius and Evans play a trick on the Host involving Germans, but it is never properly explained. Scholars speculate that a scene was lost from the original play.)*

Bardolph: Sir, the Germans want to borrow three of your horses to go meet the Duke at the court tomorrow.

Host: Duke? What duke?

Bardolph: Some visiting German duke, I think.

Host: I haven't heard anything about a visiting German duke.

Bardolph: Well, anyway, they need three horses.

Host: They can have them, but they'll pay for them. They've been here a week and they've run up quite a tab. They'd better start paying. You tell them.

Bardolph: I will, sir.

(Bardolph leaves.)

Act 4, Scene 2. *In Ford's house. Page, Ford, their Wives, and Evans come in.*

Evans: That's the best bit of trickery I ever heard!

Ford: Wife, I promise I'll never doubt you gain.

Page: I think we should stick it to Falstaff again. It's more fun than bird-hunting.

Ford: He deserves it. That's for sure.

Mist. Page: He still doesn't realize we double-crossed him.

Mist. Ford: No. We can prank him one more time. In the park at midnight.

Evans: Oh, he won't fall for another prank now.

Mist. Ford: Yes, he will. We have a plan.

Mist. Page: You've heard of Herne the hunter—the ghost who's supposed to haunt the park?

Ford: I've heard of him.

Mist. Page: In the wintertime he circles the big oak tree and rattles his chains and bewitches the cattle.

Mist. Ford: And he's got big horns like a deer.

Mist. Page: Plenty of people still believe in him.

Page: Yes, yes. They're afraid to go near the old oak at midnight. So what?

Mist. Ford: Here's the plan. We'll arrange to meet Falstaff at the oak at midnight, and we'll tell him to be disguised like Herne's ghost—to scare away anyone who might catch us, you see.

Page: And then what?

Mist. Page: Anne and the children will be dressed like fairies, and they'll be hiding. Then when we meet Falstaff at the tree, the kids will jump out and scare the hell out of him and make him think he's going to hell for his sins.

Evans: I like it! It's very Christian. Even better than Halloween.

Mist. Page: Anne will be the Queen of the Fairies since she's the oldest. All our other kids will be the fairies.

Page (Aside to the audience): This is perfect. I'll arrange for Master Slender to be there, and at the right moment he'll snatch Anne away and marry her.

Ford: I should disguise myself as Brook one more time and make sure Falstaff will be there.

Evans (To Mist. Page): You'll need costumes for the kids. I can help with that. And I can help you coach them.—Oh, this'll be fun!

Page: Yes, yes. Let's go.

(Evans, Ford, and Page leave.)

Mist. Page (To Mist. Ford): You send Mistress Quickly to Falstaff again. She has to give him instructions on where to meet us.

Mist. Ford: I'll go see her now.

(Mistress Ford leaves.)

Mist. Page: This is perfect. I'll arrange for Doctor Caius to be there, and at the right moment he can grab Anne and take her away and marry her.

(She leaves.)

Act 4, Scene 5. *In the Garter Inn. The Host is wiping a table when Simple comes in.*

Host: What'll you have, bumpkin?

Simple: Em—em—

Host: Speak, dummy!

Simple: Em, I've come to speak to Sir John Falstaff. Master Slender sent me.

Host: His room's up there. Go on up and knock. If he doesn't answer, he's probably dead. Then I can turn his room into a tourist attraction and make some money—the Haunted Room of Sir John Falstaff!

Simple: I'm afraid to knock, sir. I saw a fat, old woman go up and I'd rather wait till she leaves.

Host (Facetiously): What! A fat, old woman? She'll go through his pockets before I can! *(Calling)* Sir John! Are you alive up there?

Falstaff (Within): What do you want?

Host: A simpleton named Simple is waiting for the fat woman to leave! Tell her to go! This is an honourable establishment!—Relatively speaking.

(Falstaff comes in.)

Falstaff: It's all right. She's gone.

Simple: Wasn't that the wise woman of Brainford?

Falstaff: The wise woman of—Why, yes, as a matter of fact. She's a wise woman. Not a witch. Just wise.

Simple: Master Slender saw her running down the street, and he wanted me to ask her if Nym, the fellow who cheated him of his gold chain, had robbed him of it.

Falstaff: Ah.—Yes, I asked her about that.

Simple: And what did she say?

Falstaff: She said the very same man who cheated him was the one who robbed him.

Simple: Oh. I see.—And there was something else I was supposed to ask.

Falstaff: Like what?

Simple: Em—it's rather private.

Host: I'll have no privacy in my establishment. Speak, you scoundrel!

Simple: Em—it was concerning Mistress Anne Page.

Falstaff: What about her?

Simple: Master Slender wanted to know if it would be his fortune to have her or not.

Falstaff: Yes, that's his fortune.

Simple: What is?

Falstaff: To have her or not. The wise woman told me. You can tell Master Slender.

Simple (Confused): Oh.—Thank you, sir. I shall report it to him.—Well, goodbye. Thank you.

(Simple leaves.)

Host: Goodbye, dummy.—So—was there a wise woman in your room? If so, there may be a snowman in hell.

Falstaff: There was, indeed. And I learned more from her than I ever learned before in my life.
(*Rubbing the back of his head.*) And I was paid to learn.

(*Bardolph rushes in, covered in mud.*)

Bardolph: Those thieves! They took your horses!

Host: Who did?

Bardolph: The Germans. They knocked me into the mud and took off with your horses!

Host: I thought you said they were going to meet some duke.

Bardolph: Yes, that's what they said, but—

Host: Well, then, forget it. Germans are honest, aren't they?

(*Evans comes in.*)

Evans: My good host. I came to warn you.

Host: What's the matter?

Evans: I've just learned that there are three Germans who have been stealing horses from all the innkeepers in the county. So watch out.

(*Evans goes out. Then Doctor Caius comes in.*)

Caius: My friend, host of the Garter! Good thing I find you. I hear you get ready to receive a duke from Germany.

Host: Em—what about him?

Caius: Well, I tell you in truth there is no such duke coming.

(*Caius leaves. The Host is perplexed for a moment, then realizes that he's been pranked by Evans and Caius.*)

Host: Those bastards!—Caius!—Evans!—Sir John, I've been duped!

(*The Host runs out, followed by Bardolph.*)

Falstaff: Now he knows how it feels.—Ach! What I've been through.—I'm being punished, that's what it is. Ever since I cheated at pinochle when I was a boy, I've had nothing but bad luck. If I knew any prayers, I'd say them and repent.

(*Mistress Quickly comes in.*)

Falstaff: Not you again. What do you want now?

Mist. Quickly: The ladies sent me to apologize for the unfortunate mishap.

Falstaff: Oh, please. Spare me.

Mist. Quickly: Oh, sir, if you only knew what bad trouble Mistress Ford got into—all because she loves you.

Falstaff: Don't talk to me about trouble. I got beaten with a stick, and after that a constable mistook me for the witch of Brainford and wanted to lock me up. And he would have if it wasn't for my cleverness in passing myself off as an innocent old lady.

Mist. Quickly: It's the stars, sir. They have a way of thwarting people in love. It's a test of your sincerity. But if you'll let me speak to you privately—in your room—I have a letter for you that will put a smile on your face, believe me.

Falstaff: Oh—all right. Come on up to my room.

(They go out.)

Act 4, Scene 6. *The Garter Inn. The Host is sitting and looking gloomy when Fenton comes in.*

Fenton: My good host!

Host: Not now, Fenton. I've been ripped off. I'm so miserable right now.

Fenton: I'm sorry to hear it, but just hear me out. I have a favour to ask, and if you help me, I'll pay you enough to cover your losses, plus a hundred pounds to the good.

Host: Oh! In that case you have my full attention.

Fenton: You know that I'm in love with Anne Page.

Host: Everyone knows.

Fenton: Well, she loves me, too. And we want to get married. Now here's the situation. Anne has told me that there's an elaborate joke being prepared for Falstaff. It's going to take place at Herne's oak tonight at midnight. Anne is going to be disguised as the Fairy Queen, and the other Page children and Ford children are going to be the fairies. Her father has told her to dress in white so Slender will spot her and take her away to Eton to be married. But her mother has told her to dress in green so Doctor Caius can pick her out and take her away and marry her.

Host: So what's she going to do?

Fenton: She told both her parents she'd follow their instructions, but actually she's going to wait for me. I'm going to take her away and marry her. I need you to find a vicar and have him wait for us at the church between midnight and one o'clock. Can you do that?

Host: Hell, yes! It's a deal!

Fenton: Thank you!

(They shake hands. Fenton leaves.)

Act 5, Scene 1. *Falstaff's room in the Garter Inn. A conversation is in progress between Falstaff and Mistress Quickly.*

Falstaff: This is the third appointment I'm making with her. Nothing better go wrong this time.

Mist. Quickly: The third time's the charm, as they say, sir.

Falstaff: I hope you're right. This plan sounds crazy, if you ask me.

Mist. Quickly: There's a method to the madness, as they say, sir. I'll get you a chain and a pair of horns to wear.

Falstaff: Fine. Now go.—And don't look too happy when you leave the room. I don't want people to get the wrong idea.

Mist. Quickly: Very good, sir. Goodbye.

(Mistress Quickly leaves. Shortly thereafter, Ford comes in, again disguised as Brook.)

Ford: Sir John!

Falstaff: Ah, Master Brook! Good news, sir. The whole thing will be settled tonight. Be in the park at midnight tonight—at Herne's oak.

Ford: Didn't you see her yesterday?

Falstaff: I did, but I got chased out by her lunatic husband. I was disguised as a woman, so all I could do was run. If I'd been in my true guise, I would've stood up to him, believe me. But I intend to have the last laugh. I'll seduce his wife, just like you asked me to. After that, I promise you, she'll be all yours.

Ford: Ah, wonderful!

Falstaff: Come along, Master Brook, and I'll tell you more about that miserable little man Ford. And you will see something amazing tonight in the park!

Ford: I can hardly wait!

(Falstaff and Ford leave.)

Act 5, Scene 2. *In the park at night. Page, Shallow, and Slender come in. A distant clock strikes ten.*

Page: Ten o'clock. Come on, we'll hide in the ditch and wait for the fairies to show up. They'll have candles.—Slender, be ready to spot my daughter.

Slender: Don't worry. We agreed on a password. When I say "Manchester," she'll reply "United."—United? Get it? Like married?

Shallow: Isn't he clever?

Page: He sure is. My future son-in-law.—Come on.

(They leave.)

Act 5, Scene 3. *A street near the park. Mistress Page, Mistress Ford, and Doctor Caius come in.*

Mist. Page: Remember, doctor, they'll all be disguised, but my daughter will be the one in green. When you see your opportunity, just take her by the hand and lead her away. You go on ahead of us now.

Caius: Okay. Very good.

(Caius leaves.)

Mist. Ford: Where's your daughter and the fairies and Sir Hugh?

Mist. Page: They're hiding in a ditch near Herne's oak. After we meet up with Falstaff, they'll jump out.

Mist. Ford: Won't he be surprised!

Mist. Page: He'll be so shocked he may actually mend his ways after this. Come on.

(They leave.)

Act. 5, Scene 4. *In the park. Evans, disguised as a Satyr, comes in with the children, disguised as Fairies.*

Evans: Come alone, fairies, and remember your parts. When I give you the word, you jump out and surprise the fat man.

(He leads the Fairies out.)

Act 5, Scene 5. *Midnight at Herne's oak. A distant clock strikes twelve. Falstaff comes in wearing deer antlers and carrying a chain.*

Falstaff: It's midnight. My sweet little doe should be here any minute. I feel like a bloody fool with these stupid horns, but if this is what I have to do to score, I'll do it.

(Mistress Ford and Mistress Page come in.)

Mist. Ford: Sir John!

Falstaff: Ah! Madam!

Mist. Ford: My handsome buck!

Falstaff: My deer—ha, ha! Get it?

(He embraces her.)

Mist. Ford: I've brought Mistress Page with me. I hope you don't mind.

Falstaff: Not at all! There's enough of me to go around—ha, ha! How do I look? I'm Herne the hunter. *(He rattles his chain.)* Very spooky, eh?—Ha, ha!

Mist. Page: Are those horns for our husbands?—Ha, ha!

Falstaff: Yes, why not? What good are husbands anyway?

(A distant noise of horns is heard.)

Mist. Page (Feigning alarm): What's that?

Mist. Ford: The trumpets of Judgment! We've been discovered! Heaven forgive us!

Mist. Page: We must run!

Falstaff: Wait!

(The Wives run out.)

Falstaff: What the hell?—The devil doesn't want me. He's afraid I'd take over.

(Coming in disguised are Evans, as a Satyr, Anne Page, as Queen of the Fairies, Pistol, as Hobgoblin, and the children as Fairies. One bigger child is in white, and another is in green. The Fairies are all carrying candles. [Author's note: The Yale Shakespeare edition has Anne as the Queen of the Fairies, but the New Penguin edition has Mistress Quickly in that role. I think Anne is more appropriate.])

Falstaff: What the devil!—Who are you?

Evans: I'm the Satyr, and I know a lecher when I see one!

Pistol: And I'm Hobgoblin, and I know a scoundrel when I see one!

Anne: And I am the Queen of the Fairies! The wicked shall be punished!—Fairies, he's the one!

(The Fairies dance around Falstaff, pinching him and burning him with their candles.)

Fairies (Singing):

Heaven knows who's wicked,
And you're going to hell!
Devil take you, devil take you!

Heaven knows who's wicked,
And you're going to hell!
Devil take you, devil take you!

(Falstaff screams in fright and falls face down on the ground and covers his head. As the Fairies continue to dance around him, Doctor Caius comes in stealthily and grabs the hand of a Fairy dressed in green and takes "her" away. Then Slender comes in another way and grabs the hand of a Fairy dressed in white and takes "her" away. Finally, Fenton sneaks in and grabs Anne and runs out with her. Then another sound of hunting horns is heard and the Fairies, Evans, and Pistol run away. Falstaff gets up. Then Page, Ford, the Wives, and Evans come in.)

Page: So! Sir John Falstaff—caught in the act. Or should I address you as Herne the hunter—ha, ha!

Mist. Page: Think you can fool Windsor wives, do you?

Ford: Who's wearing the horns now?

Falstaff: Master Ford!—What a coincidence!—Oh!—Out for a late stroll?—Ha, ha!

Ford: Remember Master Brook?

Falstaff: Master Brook?—Em, I think he might be around someplace.

(Ford points to himself.)

Falstaff: Ohhh—I do believe I've been made an ass.

Ford: Yes—a big one.

Falstaff: Then those weren't real fairies.

Ford: No.

Falstaff: Well, then I'm not going to hell after all, am I?

Evans: Not if you give up your wicked ways. Otherwise, you'll really be pinched and burned.

Falstaff: I've learned my lesson. I've been well and truly pranked—and chastened. And I deserve it.

Mist. Page: Did you really think Mistress Ford and I could have a romantic interest in you?

Mist. Ford: Windsor wives can be merry, but we're still honest.

Mist. Page: And not stupid.

Falstaff: Well, beat my brains out with a big stick.

Ford: No, we won't do that. But you are going to repay all the money you got from Master Brook.

Falstaff: Oh, God.

Ford: Over time, if necessary.

Page: Cheer up, Sir John. The evening's not a total disaster. In fact, I'm very happy because Master Slender has married my daughter by now.

Mist. Page (Aside to the audience): He doesn't know! Doctor Caius has married her!

(Slender comes in.)

Slender: Master Page!

Page: My new son! How did it go?

Slender: I got all the way to Eton with your daughter—only to find that she wasn't your daughter. She wasn't even a girl. He was a boy.

Page: What! Then you grabbed the wrong person.

Slender: But she—I mean he—knew the password.

Mist. Page: Don't be angry, George. I knew what you were planning, so I had Anne wear green so Doctor Caius could take her away and marry her.

Page: What!

(Doctor Caius comes in.)

Caius: Mistress Page, I have been deceived! Your daughter was not your daughter. She was a boy.

Mist. Page: What! I told you to take the one in green.

Caius: I did. The one in green.—And I married him! It's terrible! I am ruined!

(Caius goes out.)

Ford: If Doctor Caius didn't marry her, and Slender didn't marry her, then what happened to her?

Page: I'm afraid to think.

(Fenton comes in with Anne Page.)

Page: Fenton!—Anne!

Anne: Em—father—mother—we're married.

Page and Mist. Page: What!—Married?

Fenton: You wanted to marry her off to someone she didn't love. But I'm the one she loves.

Anne: Don't be angry. I had to deceive you both. What else could I do?

Ford: Master Page, the deal has been done, and there's nothing you can do about it. So just accept it.

Evans: Yes, that's the best way. You can see how happy they are.

Falstaff: Well! True love found a proper match after all.

Mist. Page (To Anne and Fenton): May you both be happy and grow very old together.

Page: Amen to that. *(He embraces Fenton.)* And now let's all go back to our place and celebrate.—You, too, Sir John.

Falstaff: Then I'm forgiven?

Page: Yes. Why not?

Ford: Sir John, you weren't completely untruthful.

Falstaff: I wasn't?

Ford: No. You did promise me Mistress Ford would be all mine. (*Aside to Falstaff*) And when I get her home, I'm going to—(*He whispers the rest.*)

Falstaff: Ha, ha! Good for you, Master Ford!

(*They all leave.*)

END

Posted on March 8, 2013 by Crad Kilodney, Toronto, Canada.

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